DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 128 EA 016 221

AUTHOR	De Bevoise, Wynn, Ed.
TITLE	Collaboration Wears a Layered Look.
INSTITUTION	Oregon Univ., Eugene. Center for Educational Policy and Management.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	83
NOTE	13p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications, Center on Educational Policy and Management, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 (free).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	R & D Perspectives; Spr-Sum 1983
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Consortia; *Cooperative Planning; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Policy; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interschool Communication; Program Administration; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; *Program Improvement
IDENTIFIERS	*Willamette Valley Education Consortium OR

ABSTRACT

This issue focuses on support and cooperation among various components of the educational community, specifically as this has been achieved by the Willamette Valley (Oregon) Education Consortium, a research-based organization of school districts, educational agencies, and an institute of higher education. The first article describes how schools need to understand and incorporate knowledge about teacher work in ever-evolving attempts to improve student learning. Through planning bodies composed of people from different levels, schools can clarify classroom objectives and needed resources. The second article discusses how a research-based consortium of school districts serves as a vehicle for planning and implementation through a three-step process: (1) policy-making and planning; (2) program design and development; (3) program implementation, evaluation, and refinement. The third article is an account of meetings of the consortium board of directors and the planning council. It illustrates how the consortium plans and implements its programs through open debate and discussion, integrating diverse outlooks from the various sectors to achieve a balanced and adaptive view of school improvement. (TE)

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Collaboration Wears A Layered Look

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R & D Perspectives is a quarterly publication of CEPM, produced by Wynn De Bevoise. We welcome your comments.

EA 016 221

Common purposes and mutual understanding in school improvement efforts demand that the improvers continually climb and descend stairways, brave suspension bridges, and at times cross moats encircling foreign castles. Those who need to participate—teachers, administrators, and personnel from the district offices, education service districts, state departments of education, and the university and research communities—represent different levels of the school organization and, indeed, of the school system.

Too frequently this cast of characters tends to work autonomously, fragmenting the schools and pulling them in different directions. As a consequence of poor communication and lack of empathy among personnel involved in the different layers of schooling, the support and cooperation so crucial to improvement programs are absent.

In the first article in this issue of *R&D Perspectives*, Kenneth Duckworth, Associate Director for Research at the Center for Educational Policy and Management (CEPM), describes how schools need to understand and incorporate knowledge about teacher work in ever-evolving attempts to improve student learning. Through planning bodies composed of people from the different levels of the school system, schools can work toward a clearer definition of what teachers need to do in the classroom and what resources are needed for them to accomplish their tasks.

In the second article, Glen Fielding and Del Schalock, staff members of the Willamette Valley (Oregon) Education Consortium, discuss how a research-based consortium of school districts can serve as a vehicle for the kind of planning and implementation Duckworth advocates. The Consortium's long-term school improvement programs reflect a coordination of personnel and organizations that rarely occurs. After a decade of work, the Consortium, which has participated in CEPM's research activities this year, is finding evidence that its approach to educational change is working.

As an illustration of how the Consortium plans, designs, and implements its programs, Wynn De Bevoise, editor of *R&D Perspectives*, has contributed an account of meetings of two of its governing bodies.

The Agenda, Incentives, and Resources of School Improvement

By Kenneth Duckworth

The tide of public rhetoric about school improvement is cresting again. As in earlier educational

"crises," the public peers into the school and does not like what it sees. Another image is projected of what schools should be, and schools are exhorted to conform. Past decades have spawned images of racial integration, spontaneous and unfettered learning, and universal attainment of basic skills in reading and math. Now the image depicts excellence in math and science with a personal computer somewhere in the picture. The succession of such images over such a relatively short time span ought to warn us that either the public is fickle or there are several publics with different desires and the political process gives voice to only one of these at a time.

New academic goals will have practical meaning only to the extent that they are worked through in terms of what is to be learned by individual students, how the student is to be motivated to learn, and what the student needs in order to learn.

For example, the recent report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), "A Nation at Risk," while itself a thoughtful document, is being seized by the media and by politicians as a battle cry against the mediocrity of the schools. The several recommendations of the report include upgrading academic requirements and curriculum content, increasing the time students spend in academic learning, improving the quality of teachers, and raising both community expectations of and funding for schools. These are worthwhile goals, and careful thought should be given to the means and costs of their attainment. Instead, simplistic solutions like merit pay for teachers are advocated as though single decisions would solve the problem and transform the schools. One reason for this sort of error may be that the NCEE report is nearly silent about the processes of school improvement.

This phenomenon—demanding results without specifying the means—is not new. The last compelling image for school transformation, universal attainment of basic skills (now labeled "educational equality" in contrast to "educational excellence"), gave rise to a series of research studies on schools that seemed to be effective in terms of that image. The characteristics of "effective schools" were described (e.g. Brookover et al. 1979), and the descriptions were treated as prescriptions for other schools. Researchers now point out that those studies provided little information about how the schools became effective or what could be done by a principal of an ineffective school to turn that school around. The working out of the details was left up to each administrator.

Thinking Through School Improvement Processes

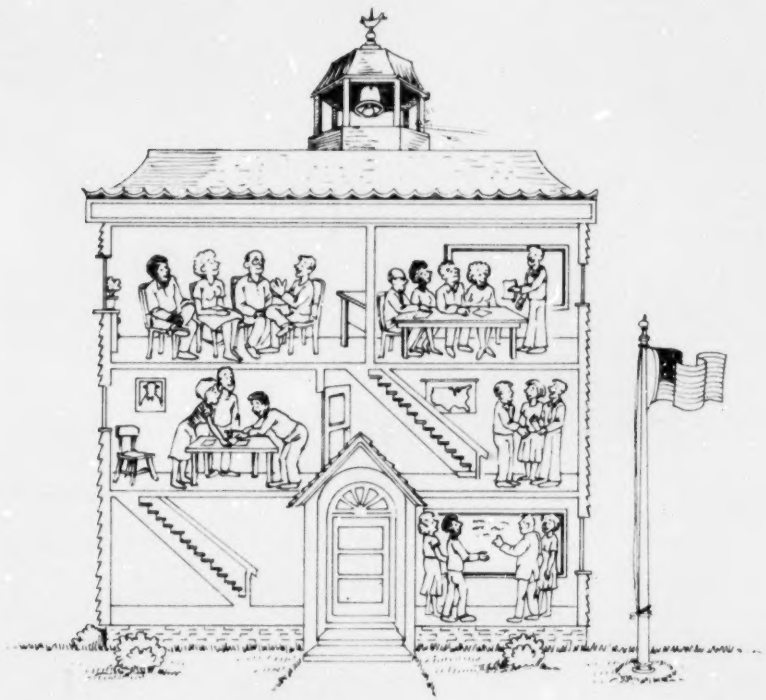
Stewart Purkey and Marshall Smith of the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research have written a very useful critique of those studies and have begun thinking through their implications for change (1982). They distinguish organizational variables that may be susceptible to administrative alteration from climate variables that have to develop over time. Some key organizational variables from their list include school-level problem-solving processes, leadership in new endeavors, a structure for organizing the curriculum and articulating its goals across the grade levels, staff development activities, and official recognition of academic successes. These administrative devices are to be directed towards maximizing learning time and developing such climate variables as shared goals and expectations, collegial relationships among teachers and administrators, and a communal spirit within an orderly environment. These are essential elements of school improvement processes for administrators to keep in mind. I would go farther and argue the necessity of thinking through how these school-level processes interact with the work of individual teachers and the administrative hierarchy.

In developing this argument, I will draw both on the research paradigm that I have been developing for the Center for Educational Policy and Management (Duckworth 1981, 1983) and on the key elements of the successful venture in school improvement that is described by Glen Fielding and Del Schalock in a companion piece in this issue.

The CEPM research paradigm places the learner at the center of any problem regarding school achievement outcomes. New academic goals will have practical meaning only to the extent that they are worked through in terms of what is to be learned by individual students, how the student is to be motivated to learn, and what the student needs in order to learn.

These are termed the agenda, incentives, and resources for student work. The research community is well advanced in working through many of these questions for academic goals at different levels of schooling. This research-in-progress can and should be incorporated into school improvement efforts; sadly, it seldom is. A model for such incorporation is the Valley Education Consortium effort to be described. A current thrust in this effort is the study of local staff development in mathematics teaching described by Meredith Gall in the preceding issue of *R&D Perspectives.* The Consortium has developed an articulated set of learning objectives for grades 1-8 in mathematics which sets forth the agenda for student work in this subject in a far more systematic way than is common in schools.

Of particular importance for the argument here, however, are the corresponding agenda, incentives, and resources for *teaching.* Research has shown that teachers affect student learning at many different levels of classroom activity. Rebecca Barr and Robert Dreeben of the University of Chicago argue that teachers make important decisions about the information on performance given to individual students, about the content and pacing of work in instructional groups, and about the management of classroom life in general (1983). Each of these decisions affects student learning. Hence for school improvement to succeed, teachers must develop multilayered agenda, respond to incentives for the hard work of mastering rather than merely coping with the complex interactive events of the classroom, and obtain required resources, not all of which can be anticipated. Many public school reformers seem unaware of the complexity of teacher work. Consequently, simple images of school improvement too often get translated into single-minded fads in teaching that are seldom effective in the complex situation just sketched.



The Valley Education Consortium has attempted to deal with this complexity by developing elaborate curriculum and assessment materials that can be used by teachers to solve problems at the individual, instructional group, and classroom levels. Moreover, the Consortium has provided incentives for teachers to experiment with these materials with the guidance of principals, lead teachers, and other colleagues. Finally, the Consortium's committee structure elicits

information on teacher resource needs and endeavors to provide the means for the objectives that are adopted by consensus. Hence the operation is alert to teacher work agenda, incentives, and resources as vital links in bringing new educational goals to bear on the learning processes of students.

Teacher Involvement in Planning

In general, such alertness can come only from serious and sustained teacher involvement in the planning and monitoring of school improvement. It is now well established that teacher ownership of a new curriculum—or of new emphases on academic learning time or specific teaching skills—requires involvement in the development and adoption of that curriculum (Fullan and Pomfret 1977). What the Valley Education Consortium's experience shows is that sustained involvement in planning and monitoring is necessary in order to keep the image of improvement vivid and focused for teachers, to allow for collective teacher learning and growth, and to induct new teachers into the collaborative effort. Moreover, school-level efforts in collaboration and staff development need to be broken down into the diverse interactions among teachers and between teachers and administrators that are important for improvement. Some teachers will be adept in the skills involved in training programs and can provide inspiration and assistance to others; other teachers will require patience and encouragement to seek help in their areas of weakness.

Beverly Showers' work at CEPM has demonstrated the importance of paired coaching relationships in the follow-up on staff development activities provided for entire faculties. In addition, by using a deliberate schedule of experimentation and development for new curricular units, the Valley Education Consortium encourages individual teachers to think through modifications in the innovation that suit their personal teaching styles or match current student needs. Such adaptation completes the chain that links curriculum development to teaching. This effort, like Judith Little's research (1982), documents the strength of teacher incentives rooted in recognition, professional development, and collaboration rather than financial inducements tied to fidelity of implementation.

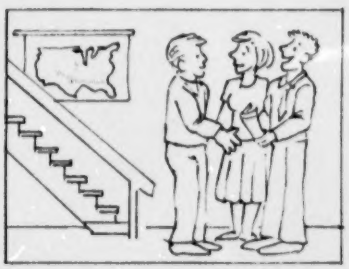
Instructional Leadership

Having established the framework for teacher orientation to instructional improvement, investment in working through changes in individual teaching strategies, and articulation of resources needed as these strategies evolve, let us now turn our attention to the school principal and his or her place in the district administrative hierarchy. The first question is whether the processes sketched above can be led by the principal. There are two views on this matter. One view, expressed in a recent CEPM seminar by Richard Mesa, former superintendent of a California school district and now that state's chief deputy superintendent of schools, is that principals *can* acquire the expertise necessary to become instructional leaders and that only principals can sustain the pressure on teachers to keep school improvement rolling. The other view, represented by several recent studies of principal work behavior (e.g. Morris and colleagues 1981; Willower and Kmetz 1982; Martin and Willower 1982), argues that principals spend little time in instructional management. The inference drawn is that most principals have far too much else to do in operating schools to take on that role. Without deciding the issue, let us grant that some principals can perform as Mesa wishes but that other principals will continue to devote little time to instructional management. The question then is how district leadership can support the first group of principals in their efforts while providing substitute sources of instructional leadership in the schools of the second group (Carnine, Gersten, and Green 1982).

Here again, the Valley Education Consortium provides a model. An interlocking governance committee, composed of district and education service district superintendents, and planning committee, composed of principals and other middle managers, enable administrators so disposed to take a leadership role in furthering the curriculum development project. However, the committee structure also allows for others, such as research consultants and intermediate education agency personnel, to step in where supplementary skills are needed. Moreover, the Consortium includes work groups with administrators and teachers and program implementation teams in which the principal is assisted by a lead teacher

Simple images of school improvement too often get translated into single-minded fads in teaching that are seldom effective in the complex situations of most classrooms.

who can provide instructional leadership where the occasion demands. Finally, this structure ensures that school-level personnel are continually reminded of district policy on school improvement while district-level personnel are continually reminded of the problems and needs of classroom implementation efforts.



This continuous interactive framework is important because the principal and lead teacher's activities in implementing change are as complex as the teacher's activities in the classroom described above. These personnel work with the faculty as a whole, with subgroups involved in particular phases of curriculum change, and with individual teachers. Thus there are problems of working on technical aspects of specific curricula while at the same time maintaining the involvement of the faculty as a whole in the improvement effort.

Judith Little (1982) has argued that school leaders need to protect those teachers who may become overinvolved in after-school work by distributing tasks across the faculty. Otherwise, the natural enthusiasts may become candidates for burnout while the other teachers gradually lose sight of the project goals. Similarly, the principal and lead teacher must celebrate individual cases of success without engendering suspicions of favoritism and must confront teachers who are undermining the faculty's efforts without seeming to harass. As school instructional leaders chart a course through these waters, district-level advice and support can be critical in avoiding rocks and shoals and steadying the vessel in turbulent passages.

A Final Point

The definition of new agenda, creation of new incentives, and provision of new resources are evolutionary processes. The give-and-take between individual teacher work and school management, and between school management and district policy, involves reciprocal influence and adjustment over time. The image of the transformed school is often associated with the notion of the quick fix. There are no quick fixes in school improvement. The Valley Education Consortium has taken several years to arrive at its present stage of success, and several more years will be required for full unfolding of its plans. In truth, school improvement projects are never-ending. They are composed of tidal ebbs and flows that change the landscape unceasingly. The remarks in these pages call for management of these processes towards specific goals. They are not sympathetic to dreams of a great wave that will transform the scene in a single stroke.

There are no quick fixes in school improvement. . . In truth, school improvement projects are never-ending. They are composed of tidal ebbs and flows that change the landscape unceasingly.

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School Improvement Through an Educational Consortium: A Model and a Process

By Glen Fielding and Del Schalock

For nearly a decade, the Valley Education Consortium (VEC), an organization in western Oregon of school districts, educational agencies, and an institution of higher education, has been working to improve schools. During the last several years, VEC's improvement efforts have been guided by a particular model of schooling—a model that is outlined in Oregon's 1980 standards for elementary and secondary schools and is anchored to recent literature on school effectiveness. To put this model into practice, the Consortium has followed a carefully sequenced process involving staff from all member organizations. This article discusses the model underlying VEC's work and the process used to translate the model into operational policies and programs.

The Model

At the foundation of VEC's school improvement effort is a model of schooling that depends on both specified learning goals for students and information on students' goal attainment. The model is termed "outcome-oriented" because it assumes that learning, instruction, and assessment all are greatly influenced by what students are expected to achieve in school. The model is "information-based" because it assumes that evidence on students' attainment of specific goals is critically important in guiding instruction and managing instructional programs. Clarity about outcomes to be achieved and information on outcome attainment are the twin pillars of the approach to schooling that VEC has been trying to implement.

Students learn most effectively when the outcomes they are expected to achieve are clear, meaningful, and appropriately demanding. Current literature suggests that in successful schools high expectations for learning are clearly and consistently communicated by all members of a school faculty. Moreover, the learning outcomes called for in one grade or course build on outcomes achieved previously and lay the groundwork for outcomes to be attained in the future.

Expected Learning Outcomes

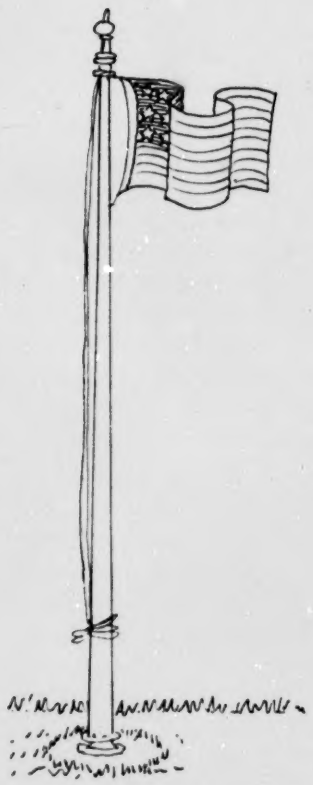
Studies of school organization and practice indicate that learning goals for students are often vague, diffuse, or contradictory, or are so general as to be virtually meaningless. Research further suggests that teachers, at least at the high school level, commonly are forced to abandon complex and subtle learning goals because they are unable to communicate clearly to students the nature of the learning outcomes to be achieved and the way in which they will be measured. Similarly, managers of instructional programs frequently focus on indirect measures of program effectiveness, such as the amount of time allocated to teaching a particular subject or the variety of instructional materials accompanying a program, because they are unable to identify, let alone assess, the learning outcomes a program is intended to produce. Schools traditionally have operated without a clear or common understanding of what students are supposed to learn.

The model guiding VEC's work holds that a clear and meaningful set of expectations for student learning is the cornerstone of effective schooling. The model indicates that intended learning outcomes are to be reviewed critically by teachers, administrators, and, to the extent appropriate, parents and community groups. Broad agreement about outcomes to be attained provides a common framework for designing instruction and evaluating its effects.

Information on Outcome Attainment

However refined a set of expected learning outcomes might be, it will carry little weight with students, teachers, administrators, or parents unless it is supported by procedures for assessing students' learning progress. Such procedures are important for two reasons. One is that they give concrete illustration of the outcomes expected. For example, the learning goal "students will be able to write logically coherent paragraphs" is quite abstract. Procedures for evaluating student writing that provide examples of paragraphs written with differing levels of coherence help students, teachers, and parents gain a better understanding of the expected product. When sensitively constructed, tests and assessment procedures clarify learning goals.

Procedures for outcome assessment also are important because of the information that comes from their use. Students need information on the progress they are making toward learning goals to confirm how much and how well they have learned or to identify gaps in their learning. Teachers



need information on outcome attainment to guide instructional plans and decisions and to assign grades. Administrators use assessment information to make student placement decisions and to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs.

Research suggests that the information on student learning that typically is produced and used in schools is not consistently related to expected learning outcomes. This is partly because expected outcomes are often poorly defined. But even when desired outcomes are identified, they are rarely accompanied by corresponding tests and assessment procedures. Recent studies reveal that students frequently perceive a mismatch between what is taught and what is tested. Similarly, studies of the relationship between standardized tests used to evaluate program effectiveness and the curriculum on which programs are based indicate wide discrepancies between test content and instructional content. The time and resources needed to develop tests and assessment procedures that closely match intended learning outcomes are seldom available in school districts.

The model VEC is using calls for the creation of assessment systems in schools that furnish teachers and administrators with the information they need to monitor and evaluate student learning in relation to the learning goals set forth in a district's curriculum. It also calls for the development of procedures for managing, analyzing, and using information produced through curriculum-aligned assessment systems. According to recent studies of school effectiveness, the articulation of expected outcomes and assessment procedures and systematic attention to patterns of assessment results are associated with high levels of student achievement.

The Process

VEC has used a three-step process to translate its outcome-oriented, information-based model of schooling into workable programs: (1) policy-making and planning; (2) program design and development; and (3) program implementation, evaluation, and refinement. Each step in the process is carried out through different organizational structures.

Policy-Making and Planning

In the context of VEC's school improvement effort, policy making and planning entails resolving issues raised by the model (such as the relationship between basic skills outcomes and competence requirements for high school graduation), reaching agreement about which aspect of the model to work on at a particular time, and organizing the resources and work groups needed to complete given tasks.

Even when desired outcomes are identified, they are rarely accompanied by corresponding tests and assessment procedures.

All major conceptual and policy decisions are made by the VEC board of directors. For example, it was the board that decided to adopt the model of schooling described earlier as a guiding set of premises for the Consortium's work. The board consists of the chief executive officers of each member organization and meets every two months.

More specific planning and budgeting decisions are made by the VEC planning council. The council consists of principals, curriculum coordinators, and assistant superintendents from each member

organization and meets monthly. Responsible for recommending work priorities, establishing work groups, and assuring quality in all work undertaken, the council makes sure that the scope and sequence of improvement activities matches available resources, the skills and attitudes of the personnel to be involved, and the general climate for change prevailing in local districts.

The work of the board and council, as well as the development work described below, is supported by two part-time staff members whose backgrounds are in educational research and development. Staff play an especially important role in supporting the work of the board and council and the efforts of each work group. They also generate contracts and grants for the Consortium and carry out long-term studies of the costs and benefits of VEC-developed programs.

Program Design and Development

VEC has invested most of its energy over the last several years in creating instructional programs in the basic skills of mathematics, reading, and writing for grades 1-8. In addition, program development in critical thinking and problem solving, speaking and listening, and science has been initiated for the elementary grades. Programs that build on the work for grades 1-8 are currently being designed for the high school level.

VEC programs at grades 1-8 consist of the learning accomplishments expected of students generally at the end of each grade level, indicators of outcome attainment, related test items and assessment tools, and procedures for managing, analyzing, and using assessment information at the classroom, building, and district levels.

Programs are designed and developed by work groups established by the VEC council. These groups consist of teachers from a minimum of two school districts, and at least one administrator from an education service district or local district. Each work group is supported by a VEC staff member. Work groups meet intensively during the summer, from one to two weeks, and about once every two months during the school year. Districts generally pay for the release time and mileage costs incurred by work group meetings. Summer work is supported by Consortium funds, which are based on membership dues, sale of products, and grants and contracts.

VEC programs take three years to develop. The first year is devoted to establishing expected learning outcomes. The second year has a dual focus: (1) submitting the grade-level learning goals to review by teachers and administrators in selected Consortium districts and by recognized authorities in the relevant subject areas and (2) drafting an initial set of test items and assessment procedures that correspond to the outcomes identified. During the third year, expected outcomes are refined, draft test items and assessment procedures are improved, and new ones are created. In addition, procedures for information management and use are established.

Program Implementation, Evaluation, and Refinement

In the fourth year of work on an instructional program, the pieces and parts of the program are put together and implemented on a field test basis in two or three districts. As preparation for the field test, superintendents and VEC staff prepare a "memorandum of understanding" that indicates the roles and responsiblities of the district in carrying out the field test and the kind of assistance to be provided by the Consortium.

A great deal of responsibility for implementing the program rests on a "lead teacher" and principal team in each participating school. Selected on the basis of their involvement in program development and their effectiveness in

working with colleagues on instruction-related activites, lead teachers join principals from all schools for an orientation and planning session in late August. During this session the teams review the program and adapt implementation plans to the circumstances of their particular schools.

Throughout the year, lead teachers, with principal support, provide inservice training to their fellow teachers about the program and respond to concerns about program implementation. A monthly seminar for lead teachers and principals is held between October and June to guide the development of teacher handbooks for program implementation, to prepare mid-year and end-of-year tests drawn from VEC test item pools and assessment procedures, and to address issues encountered in using the program. Lead teacher and principal teams are the arms and legs of the Consortium. Without them, programs would be little more than printed documents.

In view of the field test, the programs are refined. Information on the costs and benefits of VEC programs is collected for three to five years after the field test and used to guide subsequent improvements in the programs.

Conclusion

Translating an outcome-oriented, information-based model of schooling into practical policies and programs has proven to be an unusually complex task. The schools, agencies, and staff involved in VEC's program development and implementation effort have been many and diverse. A great deal of time and thought has gone into identifying learning goals for students that are at the right level of difficulty and generality and do justice to recent developments in a subject area. Even more demanding has been the task of creating assessment tools for measuring outcome attainment, especially in areas that traditionally have not been systematically assessed in schools, such as critical thinking and problem solving skills or interpersonal communication. Developing procedures for managing and using information on outcome attainment has also called for substantial effort, particularly in determining the contribution that microcomputers can make to information use. Finally, integrating VEC programs into the regular and ongoing operation of schools has posed its own set of issues about staff development and school change.

Students learn most effectively when the outcomes they are expected to achieve are clear, meaningful, and appropriately demanding.

Yet, members of the Valley Education Consortium believe that the benefits to come from this long-term, many-sided improvement process will more than justify the time and resources invested. It is too early to judge the impact of VEC programs on student learning, but signals from teachers and administrators so far have been encouraging. The outcome-oriented, information-based model of schooling seems to hold a great deal of promise. This is particularly true when the model is applied in the context of an educational consortium, through a long-term and carefully sequenced process.

Editor's Note: For further information about the Valley Education Consortium, write Glen Fielding or Del Schalock, Teaching Research, Monmouth, OR 97361.

Life in a Consortium: Who Governs?

By Wynn De Bevoise

On paper, the Valley Education Consortium looks like a typical small corporation. From a cursory glance, an outsider could assume that decisions are made in the boardroom, translated into plans for action in the councilroom, fashioned into products in the teachers' work room, and obediently carried out in the classroom, with two part-time staff persons shuttling back and forth to maintain peace and ensure coordination.

On closer examination, however, a much more participative form of governance seems to be occurring. Communication among the participant groups follows a path reflecting synergy rather than hierarchy. Consortium goals and the steps to be taken toward their accomplishment have been conceived and shaped in meetings at all levels that both invite and encourage debate. The results of discussion at any one level routinely affect decisions reached at the other levels.

Observations of two meetings,

one of the board of directors and the other of the planning council, illustrate the ways in which Consortium members influence each other in working toward shared objectives and how their diverse outlooks contribute to a balanced and adaptive view of school improvement.

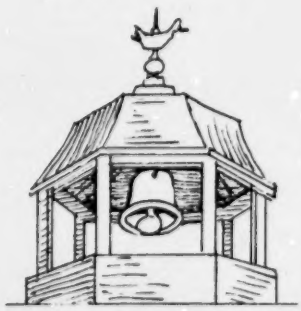
Breakfast and the Board

The board of directors held an early morning breakfast meeting in Rickreall, Oregon, a town that once served as a popular truckstop before the freeway was constructed 15 miles to the east. The town, with a restaurant, a gas station, and one school, is typical of many of the small districts contained in the three-county area served by the Consortium.

The directors' meeting was characterized by an air of easy camaraderie that extended as well to the one female member. The informal, old-boy's-club ambience illustrated the research findings on superintendents' networks and their reliance on sharing problems and successes in conversation with each other as a form of professional development.

An early agenda item, possibly duplicating the agenda of school board and staff meetings across the country, raised the question of how to respond to the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. One superintendent remarked that the report did not seem an accurate representation of conditions in Oregon. Rather, he said, it was more applicable to large school districts in the midwest. Others disagreed. They felt the indictment of the comprehensive high school curriculum to be valid, and they shared the Commission's concern about inadequate teacher preparation, especially in the basic skills. The report, however, will not change the course of the Consortium's work. Those present concurred that the Consortium has been addressing the problems defined by the Commission for almost a decade. Everyone nodded in agreement when one superintendent asserted, "The Consortium is a vehicle for responding to the Commission's report. We have a database and we have been monitoring activities to show where gains have been made. We represent a proactive rather than a despairing response."

Other agenda topics included developing a course curriculum in computer applications for teachers and progress to date in integrating critical thinking skills into the basic skills programs. One superintendent suggested that the three ESD superintendents and a staff member get



together to design preliminary descriptions of a series of courses for teachers on computer applications. Other board members immediately began to suggest resource persons from some of the schools.

"There's a knowledgeable person in Mt. Angel."

"Yes, and another in Dallas (Oregon)."

The superintendents listened with attention to the proposal on integrating critical thinking skills. They were clearly interested in the levels of skills necessary for resolution of different types of problems. The staff person concluded his presentation by noting, "Teachers are committed to doing this (incorporating critical thinking skills into the curriculum), but they are frightened by it and unsure where to go." Board members concurred that the concern with thinking skills is an appropriate focus for the Consortium's efforts.

Interestingly, the subject that generated the most animated and general discussion was a proposed meeting for lead teachers, program coordinators, and principals following the close of the school year.

"I don't know about asking teachers to attend a meeting on Friday after school is out," said one. "They might have plans for the weekend."

"And what about those who will be enrolled in summer courses at the University?"

"I think we should pay them on an extended contract."

"Well," (said with obvious pride) "my teachers will come with or without pay. They'll volunteer, they'll *want* to be there."

Ultimately, the board decided to hold the meeting as proposed and to pay the participants for attending.

The almost palpable satisfaction expressed over the products created in the work groups and the progress being made in implementation, the attention to details of the programs, and the concern about asking staff to attend a meeting not covered in the contracts indicates a healthy pattern of awareness of

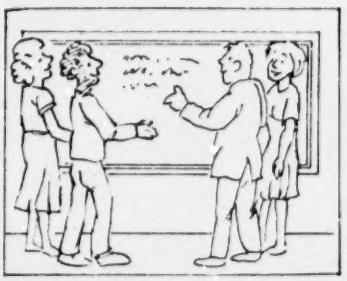
activities and attitudes at different levels of the system.

The Council and the Classroom

Members of the Consortium's planning council travelled to the Marion County Education Service District's office for their half-day meeting. One significant difference from the board meeting was the presence of a large blackboard, which was used to illustrate points made throughout the meeting. Discussion in this meeting, which was mostly devoted to approving a work plan for an improvement strategy at the secondary level, was livelier and more intense than in the board of directors' meeting. There were four women present.

The work plan divides the high school curriculum into five sections: basic skill mastery, general education, career exploration, career preparation, and life role preparation. Requirements within these five areas can be met in a variety of ways. Consortium efforts in the first year for basic skill mastery would concentrate on establishing standards for competency, defining criteria for providing remediation, and identifying courses that are closed to students who are lacking specific skills. Concerning general education, the first year would be devoted to identifying learning goals, assessment criteria, and policies on course substitution, and designating departmental responsibilities for achieving particular learning goals. There was some discussion of the materials that had been sent to council members in advance concerning whether the high school curriculum should be uniform or diverse. However, at this point, most members expressed greater interest in assessment and problems caused by raising standards for promotion than in the curriculum.

Much concern was voiced in particular about the standards for eighth-grade graduation and policies on promotion to high school. At present, many students are advanced who lack basic skills and are unable to enter regular high school courses. The specification of eighth-grade standards helps to clarify needs for remediation or retention, but it leaves untouched the political and social consequences of holding children back who are unable to achieve at grade level.



After listening to the reasoning behind the proposed work plan, one council member quipped that she felt a sense of "deja vu." "Except for our backing up to the elementary level, isn't this just what we did in 1975, or '76, or '77?"

Indeed, most educators and concerned citizens who are sitting on committees to reexamine the high school curriculum and consider higher standards for graduation must have the same suspicion. Similar discussions occurred on a national level in the late 1950s and again in the 1970s. The staff member responded, however, that now there are dramatic differences.

"Now, members of the Consortium have a clear picture of what students need to know and do to enter high school, making it possible to upgrade the standards for the high school curriculum. Remediation needs are also clearer. Moreover, we have a handle on assessment from two lines of work. We have planned course statements and we are working on the integration of teaching and testing."

"But how," persisted the woman, "is this workplan going to change the effectiveness of teachers?"

Other council members assented: "You have to keep asking if it's going to work in the classroom."

The staff member moved over to the blackboard and listed four items. "The traditional link is between curriculum and instruction," he remarked. "But we start with curriculum and *assessment.* Then we move on to program implementation and support, then program evaluation, and finally instruction and supervision."

Many of the principals around the table nodded, as though they had just been given a review lesson that suddenly made the whole course more comprehensible.

"Exactly," replied one. "The teachers are given freedom in how they present their material as long as the assessment shows that the goals are being attained. In evaluation, we are now looking at a teacher's goal attainment rather than the ability to entertain the class for an hour. In the past, we always gave the highest marks to the teachers with the greatest dramatic abilities."

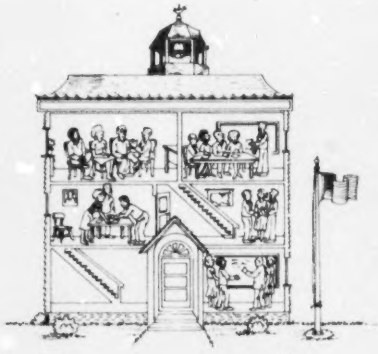
"It is just that freedom," added another "that has increased the

teachers' commitment to the Consortium's goals and outcomes."

One Consortium staff member noted after the conclusion of the meeting that a similar discussion had occurred at other times. "It's like a reaffirmation of what we've agreed upon before. But it's important; it's part of the process."

After the meeting, in looking back on her experience with the Consortium over many years, a school superintendent noted that in the beginning Consortium members did not realize the extent of revision that would be necessary after field-testing the first manuals. "We made three major revisions in four years. The programs are really built by the teachers, by the interplay of teachers across districts," she said. "The process is time-consuming and frustrating, especially in the long period between planning and implementation. But the crucial factor is the involvement of the total staff. It makes us all more aware of and thoughtful about what is taught in the classroom."

Not only does the Consortium facilitate coordination among the different levels of schooling—from the state department to the individual classroom—but it provides a medium for blending the cultures of research and practice. It is a model that is proving to have value for both worlds by focusing on the most essential mission of schools —the improvement of student learning.



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